

Leading Through Market Disruption: Why Follow the Leader Is a Game of the Past

By [LawVision](#) on October 29, 2013

Imitation may be the greatest form of flattery, but it is one of the worst approaches to establishing market leadership in today's rapidly changing legal world. For decades, partners presented with new business ideas have posed the question: "Which law firms are doing this already?" This de facto response to new business ideas kept law firms far behind other professions in their adoption of new technologies, deployment of marketing and business development and many other now common business practices.

In a market with often double-digit growth and ample client demand, this slow-paced game of follow the leader typically worked just fine. First-mover advantage, for the most part, was limited and short-lived (in part because adoption was typically slow and sporadic, even at market-leading firms). But (hats off to Mr. Dylan), times, they are a changin'.

In today's world of fierce competition, a "me too" philosophy will saddle a firm with snail-like growth at best. In a near-flat market, client dollars are flowing to the new, different and innovative. The fastest-growing legal service providers in the world are in some instances not even law firms at all. In the face of market disruption, what can traditional law firms do to shed old habits?

1. **Acceptance** – Letting go of the past can be hard, but the faster attorneys and leaders acknowledge and accept changing market dynamics the stronger the chances of success.
 - Schedule a fact-based presentation on market trends and competitive landscape
 - Subscribe to law practice management newsletters
 - Attend law firm leadership roundtables and forums
2. **Embrace change**– Moving mountains may seem an easier task than achieving behavioral and cultural change in a professional organization. Motivate shifts in thinking by:
 - Providing direct feedback from clients
 - Presenting factual evidence and case studies of what's working
 - Giving credit and celebrating those using new practices to win clients
3. **Be transparent**– Today's savvy, sophisticated clients want a better understanding of the "man behind the curtain."
 - Present clients with a matter plan including staffing and timeline
 - Inform internal team members of client budget concerns or sensitivities
 - Invite clients to participate in team meetings
 - Offer to review invoices in draft form
4. **Think different**– Instead of the "next in line" mentality, seek to generate an ongoing dialogue about how your firm is unique; not what you do better, but what you do that others don't. Don't be surprised if initially you're met with blank stares. Note,
 - Specific distinctions trump blanket statements (e.g., an in-house expert with a technical background in pipeline construction wins over "an award-winning Energy practice" in a bid for transactional work)

- Actions speak louder than words (i.e., saying your firm is the most responsive lacks authority when a competitor proposes a solution more quickly)
- Let clients tell you how you're different – if you haven't asked yet, now's the time